

URBAN ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday 27th November, 2013 at 5.00 p.m.
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor Tyler (Chair)
Councillor Hale (Vice Chair)
Councillors Ali, Duckworth, Hanif, Harley, J Jones, Sykes, K Turner and Mrs Westwood

Officers

Assistant Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services (Housing Strategy and Private Sector) (Lead Officer to the Committee); Director of the Urban Environment, Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Environmental Management), Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Culture and Leisure), Project Development Manager, Head of Street and Green Care, Team Manager (Green Care), Greenspaces Team Leader and Principal Executive Support Officer (All Directorate of the Urban Environment); Head of Accountancy and the Assistant Democratic Services Officer (Both Directorate of Corporate Resources).

18 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor Jordan.

19 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBER

It was reported that Councillor J Martin had been appointed as a substitute member for Councillor Jordan for this meeting of the Committee only.

20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No member declared an interest in any matter to be considered at this meeting.

21 MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 29th October, 2013, be approved as a correct record and signed.

22 PUBLIC FORUM

No matters were raised under this Agenda Item.

23 CHANGE IN ORDER OF BUSINESS

Pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 13(c), it was

RESOLVED

That the remaining items of business be considered in the following order:-

Agenda item numbers 7, 6 and 8

24 PARKS, NATURE RESERVES & OPEN SPACES SCRUTINY

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted acknowledging the findings of the Parks, Nature Reserves and Open Spaces Scrutiny and for the Committee to make appropriate recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Culture that would help guide future strategic direction and investment.

Maps were circulated to Members and displayed at the meeting identifying Nature Reserves, Historic Parks and proposed Community Parks within the borough and the catchment areas for each.

Some Members made comments with regard to the designation of specific green spaces within the borough, in particular those areas situated in deprived locations that currently had fewer facilities than others. Members requested that appropriate community and Ward Member engagement was undertaken in any proposals for change of use of the smaller pieces of green space referred to in the report.

In response to a request from a Member, the Director of the Urban Environment recommended that a brief update in relation to the current spend on parks be provided to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

The Chair reminded Members that green areas not designated as a Nature Reserve, Historic Park or a Community Park within the Green Spaces Asset Management Plan (GSAMP) would not be neglected, as many of them were vital green corridors, interconnecting green spaces, cycle ways, canals, river corridors, disused railway lines and footways.

RESOLVED

- (i) That the information contained in the report submitted in relation to Parks, Nature Reserves and Open Spaces be noted and that the following scrutiny outcomes be recommended to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Culture:-
- (a) A Green Spaces Asset Management Plan (GSAMP) be developed to incorporate the outcomes from this scrutiny process.
 - (b) The GSAMP should recognise the Nature Reserves, Historic Parks and designated Community Parks which will help inform the production of the emerging planning policy Development Strategy Document.
 - (c) The GSAMP should identify potential alternate uses for some of those parks and open spaces not recognised as Community Parks such as meeting demand for additional allotments, burial land and grazing subject to proper consultation.
 - (d) The GSAMP should identify smaller parcels of land and open space which could be considered for disposal where there is no amenity value, capital receipts from which could be used for reinvestment into Community Parks or for other demands subject to proper consultation.
 - (e) The GSAMP would support and promote the introduction of corridors to encourage cycling, walking and boating across the borough between selected green space linking them together to develop a Green Landscape Web of cycle ways, canals, river corridors, disused railway lines and footways unique within an urban area.
 - (f) The GSAMP supports the ongoing development of Friends Groups and explores the possibility of developing the existing Green Spaces Forum into an independent consultative body building on the community led focus for green spaces.
 - (g) That future capital funding be prioritised in supporting the designated Nature Reserves, Historic Parks and Community Parks to attain APSE Category A Level standards subject to local variations associated with regeneration and community focussed opportunities.
 - (h) That revenue support is aligned as far as practical to support the ongoing maintenance of Nature Reserves, Historic Parks and Community Parks.

- (i) That Green Care service delivery options are included as part of the Council's corporate review of service delivery options.
 - (ii) That a brief update in relation to the current spend on parks, be provided by the Director of the Urban Environment at a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.
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25 REVENUE BUDGET STRATEGY 2014/15

A joint report of the Chief Executive, Treasurer and the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on the proposed Revenue Budget Strategy for 2014/15 and the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Arising from the presentation of the report, and Appendices to the report submitted, Members asked questions and made comments as follows:-

- Landfill waste and the landfill tax that was applied;
- Reduction in road and footway maintenance;
- The proposed increase in car park charges and the adverse affect this could have on in-town businesses, which in turn could have an adverse affect on business rates paid to the Authority;
- That consideration be given to providing 2 to 3 hours free short stay parking;
- The need to review car parking enforcement activity;
- Did the proposed budget savings take account of Equality Impacts;
- With the new recycling and waste service now operational, possible consideration be given to the frequency of waste collections;
- The need to re-educate residents and companies with regards to waste and recycling;
- The possibility of working with neighbouring Black Country Authorities when resurfacing roads and footpaths with specialised machinery.

The Assistant Director of Urban Environment (Environmental Management) confirmed that contingencies and robust plans were in place to ensure that the incinerator contractual agreements were met and that joint contracts with neighbouring Black Country Authorities in relation to future road maintenance and improvement projects would be considered.

In relation to the proposed increase in car park charges, the Director of the Urban Environment referred to the difficulties in obtaining the right balance when considering car parking charges, taking into consideration due regard to regeneration activity and the need to support local traders within the current challenging financial climate which all Councils faced. He referred to the desire to find more on-street spaces where possible and informed the Committee that in comparison to neighbouring authorities, Dudley's car parking charges were still the lowest. It was indicated that options to assist business traders would be explored.

The Director of the Urban Environment confirmed that all budgetary implications were in line with the Equality Impact and that Equality Impact Assessments had been carried out as necessary. This information would be circulated to Members of the Committee by the Director of the Urban Environment.

RESOLVED

- (i) That the Cabinet's Revenue Budget Strategy proposals for 2014/15 and Medium Term Financial Strategy, as set out in the report, and Appendices to the report, submitted be noted and the Cabinet be informed that there were no observations that this Scrutiny Committee wished to make on the proposals.
- (ii) That information in relation to Equality Impact and the Equality Impact Assessments undertaken when considering budgetary implications for the Directorate of Urban Environment be circulated to Members of the Scrutiny Committee by the Director of the Urban Environment.

26 COMMENTS MADE BY THE CHAIR

This being the last meeting of the Committee attended by Sally Orton prior to her impending retirement from the Council, the Chair, on behalf of the Committee, wished her a long and happy retirement.

The meeting ended at 6.20pm.

CHAIR